

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 DRC-01 /086 W

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8229

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 8786

PLEASE PASS WHITE HOUSE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S VISIT

1. BASED ON OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH FRENCH OFFICIALS AND RESPONSIBLE OPINION-MAKERS AND OUR OWN ASSESSMENT, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO ATTEND THE POMPIDOU FUNERAL WAS RIGHT. HIS FAILURE TO ATTEND WOULD HAVE AROUSED FEELINGS OF INDIGNATION AND WOULD HAVE BEEN INTERPRETED AS EVIDENCE OF AMERICA'S WISH TO ISOLATE FRANCE AS PART OF EFFORT TO IMPOSE US DOMINANCE OVER EUROPE. THE FACT THAT THE PRESIDENT CAME, HIS ELOQUENT STATEMENTS ABOUT PRESIDENT POMPIDOU, FRANCE AND ITS PEOPLE, HIS DIGNITY AND OBVIOUS PERSONAL SENSE OF ASSOCIATION WITH A BEREAVED NATION REPRESENT A HIGHLY POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO FRANCO-AMERICAN FRIENDSHIP.

2. COMMENTS RECEIVED BY EMBASSY OFFICERS FROM FRENCH CONTACTS HAVE BEEN MIXED. WHILE SOME HAVE TENDED TO REFLECT NEGATIVE COMMENTS APPEARING IN THE MEDIA, OTHERS HAVE DISPLAYED GRATITUDE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S GESTURE IN COMING TO PARIS, FOR HIS MOVING TRIBUTE TO PRESIDENT POMPIDOU'S MEMORY AND THE FRIENDLY REFERENCES TO FRANCE AND ITS PEOPLE. OUR CONTACTS AT THE QUAI HAVE

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SPOKEN IN LAUDATORY TERMS ABOUT THE PRESIDENT. THEY

HAVE APPRECIATED THE HONOR HE DID FRANCE BY COMING, AND HAVE NOTED EXCELLENT JUDGEMENT IN CALLING ONLY ON PRESIDENT POHER, THUS AVOIDING PITFALLS OF CALLING ON OTHER LEADERS IN ATMOSPHERE OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN. CHIEF OF PROTOCOL SPOKE TO ME IN WARM TERMS OF APPRECIATION FOR THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT. IN ADDITION, ONE QUAI OFFICIAL SPECIFICALLY NOTED THE "DIGNITY AND STATESMANLIKE" COMPORTMENT OF THE PRESIDENT IN PARIS. A SIMILAR OBSERVATION WAS MADE TO EMBASSY OFFICER IN THE PROVINCES BY TWO UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS ON APRIL 8. FINALLY, MANY HAVE COMMENTED ON THE PRESIDENT'S CONTINUING "COMMAND" OF INTERNATIONAL EVENTS DESPITE HIS DOMESTIC PROBLEMS.

3. WE HAVE BEEN FRANKLY ASTONISHED -- AND DISAPPOINTED -- BY THE NEGATIVE MEDIA COMMENTS ON THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO PARIS. WHILE SOME PART OF THAT REACTION MAY BE GENUINE, WE SUSPECT THAT MUCH OF THE TENDENTIOUS AND NASTY SNIPING IS THE RESULT OF MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE REASON FOR THE PRESIDENT'S BILATERAL MEETINGS. IT MAY ALSO RESULT FROM THE EMOTIONAL OUTPOURINGS OF CERTAIN POMPIDOLIAN LOYALISTS, WHO ALREADY ANGRY AND FRUSTRATED OVER THE "UNSEEMLY" AND FAST-MOVING RACE FOR PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION, DURING WHICH THEY HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO IMPOSE A MESSMER CANDIDACY ON THE MAJORITY, HAVE IRRATIONALLY ASSUMED AN AMERICAN ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT CURRENT FRENCH DOMESTIC WEAKNESS.

SOME OF THESE LOYALISTS ACCORDING TO UNCONFIRMED REPORTS PUT PRESSURE ON THE PRESS TO GIVE THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT A NEGATIVE IMAGE. THE LATTER COULD EXPLAIN THE ORIGIN OF THE "LETTER" REFERRED TO IN NAN ROBERTSON'S NEW YORK TIMES PIECE OF APRIL 9. MOST JOURNALISTS MISTAKENLY ASSUME THAT THE INITIATIVE FOR THE PRESIDENT'S SIX BILATERAL MEETINGS CAME FROM THE US SIDE. WHEN IT IS SUGGESTED THAT THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE, JOURNALISTS ARE SURPRISED AND READILY ADMIT THIS MAKES AN ESSENTIAL DIFFERENCE IN THEIR APPRECIATION.

4. BRITISH EMBASSY HERE IS EQUALLY MYSTIFIED BY ADVERSE COMMENT IN THE PRESS. THEIR HEAD OF CHANCERY TOLD US APRIL 9 THAT BRITISH EMBASSY HAD ANTICIPATED FAVORABLE PRESS. HAVING OBSERVED FROM HIS APARTMENT OVERLOOKING CONFIDENTIAL

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FAUBOURG ST. HONORE THE CROWDS SURGING AROUND THE PRESIDENT, HE POINTED OUT CROWDS WERE ALMOST ENTIRELY FRENCH, JUDGING FROM CRIES OF "VIVE NIXON, VIVE LE PRESIDENT DES ETATS UNIS".

5. THE IMPRESSION AT ALL LEVELS OF THE EMBASSY IS THAT REACTION OF FRENCH PUBLIC WAS HIGHLY FAVORABLE TO PRESIDENT'S VISIT. IN SUM, WHILE RECOGNIZING UNDENIABLE

MIXTURE OF REACTION IN FRANCE, WE BELIEVE IT WOULD BE
A MISTAKE TO ASSUME THAT NEGATIVE PRESS REACTION
NECESSARILY REFLECTS THE TRUE FEELINGS OF THE FRENCH
PEOPLE.
IRWIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CHIEF OF STATE VISITS, NEWS MEDIA COMMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 10 APR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PARIS08786
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740082-0352
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740452/aaaabuuy.tel
Line Count: 120
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 18 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <18 APR 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <24 MAR 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: FRENCH REACTION TO PRESIDENT'S VISIT
TAGS: PFOR, FR, (NIXON, RICHARD M)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005